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## 7. NIGHT HERONS AND LITTLE CORMORANTS IN THRISSUR, KERALA

Night herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and little cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) are communal nesting local migrants which usually build nests in trees that adjoin, or are actually standing in water bodies. These birds are seen in Southern India from November to February, their breeding season. When faced with water scarcity or disturbance of the nesting grounds, the birds are known to desert traditional nesting sites and move to other suitable places. But this year in Kerala, the birds were spotted in hundreds, nesting in tall mango and jackfruit trees in the densely populated Keerankulangara area of Thrissur town, Kerala. With no large water body nearby, the birds had to depend on the nearby ponds, water tanks and even local

markets for their fish. Their cries and the stench of the droppings have made them a nuisance to the local residents who are even contemplating shooting them! The disturbance of their traditional breeding grounds like Kumaragam and adjoining areas could be the cause of this invasion. An inquiry into the cause and a speedy solution are necessary to ease the problems of the residents and also ensure the safety of the birds.

March 30, 1998

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## 8. GREY HERON WRESTING FISH FROM HERRING GULL

On February 14, 1998, I saw something so unusual that it is worth reporting. Normally it is gulls that chivvy other birds and deprive them of their prey. On this occasion, the tables were effectively turned. My attention was drawn to a grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*), a herring gull (*Larus argentatus*) and a gullbilled tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) in turmoil. At first I thought the heron

was being harried, but it soon became apparent that it was the heron who was chasing the gull, who was being further harried and prevented from making a getaway by the tern chivvying it from above. The gull was weighed down by a fish in its beak. The skirmish continued for several minutes, the three birds in the air a few feet above the tidal mud. Finally, the gull let go